

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 246

FL 016 218

AUTHOR Tinkel, A. J.
TITLE Methodology Related to Language Awareness Work.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 10p.; In: Donmall, B. G., Ed. Language Awareness. National Congress on Languages in Education Assembly (4th, York, England, July 1984). NCLE Papers and Reports 6; see FL 016 215.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Course Objectives; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Enrichment; *Curriculum Development; English Instruction; Foreign Countries; *Introductory Courses; Language; *Language Role; Language Teachers; *Linguistics; Secondary Education; *Student Centered Curriculum; Teacher Role; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Great Britain; *Language Awareness

ABSTRACT

The objectives of any language awareness course must be to lead students to a greater awareness of what they already know about language. This kind of course is ideal for student-centered activity, with the students exploring language and the teacher only occasionally imparting new facts. It will have more immediacy if it focuses on the students' linguistic ability and uses that ability to bind together elements of language awareness. Greater awareness of their own language functions should produce in students a greater sensitivity to language in general. Old-style grammar instruction, which is counter-intuitive, has alienated many people, but student-centered language awareness can reinforce and increase competence without alienating. In student-centered instruction, the native speaker's intuitions are in harmony with the teacher's presentation. The teacher's role is as a planner of guided exploration of both the native language and the students' knowledge of it. Course topics should be sequenced effectively using (1) a brief, informal introduction; (2) illustration of the concepts, without naming them; and (3) student production of examples, arguments, and refinements leading to the naming of the concept. It is more effective for students at this level to handle carefully prepared language problems than to talk about language. (MSE)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED277246

METHODOLOGY RELATED TO
LANGUAGE AWARENESS WORK

A. J. Tinkel

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Newson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FL016 218

METHODOLOGY RELATED TO LANGUAGE AWARENESS WORK

A J Tinkel

1.1 Although the concept of Language Awareness in schools now developing is wider than the aims of the authors of Language in Use¹, and in some respects is more ambitious, the basic premises of the two approaches are the same.

1.2 The authors of Language in Use pointed out that "Pupils bring to the class-room a native speaker's knowledge of and intuitions about language and its place in human society. In this sense, the task of the English teacher is not to impart a body of knowledge, but to work upon, develop, refine, and clarify the knowledge and intuitions that his pupils already possess"².

The pupils for any Language Awareness course possess a mother tongue plus an intuitive sense of how to use it. Any course designed to exploit that possession must recognise that this is the case. It must not be a lip-service recognition, but one that imbues the syllabus content, guides the choice of materials, moulds the form of any testing procedures involved and dictates the method of presentation. The way the Language Awareness course is presented to the students must inherently reflect in all its aspects the crucial fact they have language already.

1.3 If the premise of 1.2 is accepted, then the objectives of any language awareness course must be to lead the students to a greater awareness of what they intuitively know already. Its objectives must be to explore and thereby to produce a greater familiarity with what is already intuitively known, to get the students to think for themselves about what they can and already do do with their language. Such an exploration of the students' "native speaker knowledge of and intuitions about language and its place in human society" should be, and can easily be combined with the objective of widening and strengthening their awareness of language. Indeed it can be argued that development of the students' awareness is a natural consequence of a proper exploration of their language ability. When the students bring more than one mother tongue or dialect variation to the group, a Language Awareness course offers the chance to use these different tongues and dialects for comparison. By so doing the course provides a forum to give them proper value and unprejudiced presentation.

1. Doughty P, J Pearce and G Thornton. Language in Use. Edward Arnold, 1971.

2. Ibid. p.11.

1.4 The use of the students' own already-possessed linguistic knowledge in a Language Awareness course means that such a course becomes an ideal vehicle for student-centred activity. The role of the teacher is to order the material, to shape the presentation, to keep the focus steady so that the students' own knowledge can be explored systematically without their getting lost. In this way Language Awareness becomes a practical subject, with the teacher arranging the guidelines of the course progression and the conditions of each exploration. If the teacher talks about language to the students, he/she is far less likely to capture their interest, than if he/she lets them explore it for themselves under conditions carefully prepared and controlled by him/her.

1.5 Within the above concept of a practical, student-centred activity, there will sometimes be a role for the teacher as an imparter of new facts. This will be truer for some kinds of Language Awareness course than for others. For example, when students have a variety of mother tongues which are being used in the course, when facts about first language acquisition are being presented in a parenthood course, when comparisons are being made with foreign languages in a course preparatory to learning those languages, when animal communication or the history of writing and other alphabets are being studied - these and other instances obviously require the teacher to present new items of information to the students that are not part of their already-possessed linguistic knowledge. However, even in such instances, the underlying principle should remain that of examining human language ability through and by reference to that already-possessed language ability.

1.6 If Language Awareness is just an element of a wider course, that element would acquire added immediacy if it is centred on the students' own linguistic ability. This would be true whether there is an imparting of new facts, as, for example, about first language acquisition in a parenthood course, or whether the ability is being explored directly.

If Language Awareness is seen as a course in its own right, its various components need to be held together. Otherwise the course could become a series of disconnected gobbets in the eyes of the students, even more likely when the elements of the course require the teacher to impart factual knowledge, as for example in history of writing, introduction of new languages or animal communications. The particular limited aims of the course, such as preparation for learning a foreign language or introduction to different mother tongues in a multi-ethnic group, may provide such a unifying underpinning, but whether such limited aims are present or not, giving the course the underlying principle of looking at language through the students' own knowledge of it, provides the intuitively most satisfying linkage and underpinning, as well as the guide to the most stimulating method of presentation.

1.7 The unifying nature of the principle of using the students' own language as a 'point de départ' can be taken a step further. It provides a linking concept, not only for the disparate elements to do with language in a particular Language Awareness course. It also provides a vital common denominator for the wide range of Language Awareness courses that have emerged. We could claim that these courses have in common, not just the fact that they all have to do with language in some guise or other, but that they all embody a particular approach to the presentation of language to the student and that this approach predicates the method and even the view of language itself. In this way one of the strengths of the Language Awareness movement (that it is a classroom-led development based on practical solutions for immediate teaching needs) can be protected from the weakness of such a disparate development (that it is so varied as to be amorphous). The idea of exploring the students' already-possessed intuitive language ability can be the defining, as well as unifying principle of Language Awareness courses.

1.8 Greater awareness of how their language - and language in general - functions should bring about greater sensitivity to language on the part of the students. They should become more alert to how they use their mother tongue and - equally important - how it is used by others on them. The authors of Language in Use held this view: "... a basic premise of the volume is that the development of awareness in the pupil will have a positive effect upon his competence"³.

Further, if analysis of the mother tongue is approached on the lines of exploring what the students already know, this should not only produce such an enhanced awareness, but it would be doing so in a manner that makes the methodology of this mother tongue analysis complementary to the approach to mother tongue English teaching that seeks to lead the students to explore and expand their awareness of themselves and their relationship with others through expressing themselves in language.

In both cases the objective is to guide the students through a cultivation of a greater awareness of intuitive knowledge/ability towards development of their possession of that same knowledge/ability. If analysis of the mother tongue can bring about greater awareness of language in the students which benefits their use of it, and if the methodology for achieving that greater awareness is in harmony with the methodology for enhancing the individual by developing a more fruitful use of his/her language, then language awareness can offer a partnership to the 'creative use', 'self-discovery' approach to mother tongue teaching. If this is so,

3. Ibid. p.10.

then analysis of language can be incorporated into mother-tongue teaching without jeopardising the developments of recent years and without a return to old-style 'grammar' teaching.

1.9 It has been argued that Language Awareness as applied to analysis of language heralds a return to such old-style 'grammar' teaching. This is viewed with horror by some and with relief by others. The authors of Language in Use point out: "The long argument over the teaching of 'grammar' in schools really concentrated upon the effects of a certain kind of explicit knowledge of the language, such as classification of words and parsing, on pupils' use of language. When teachers discovered that there seemed to be no observable effect of the one upon the other they rejected teaching about language, because they could see no justification for it. It was unfortunate that the study of language came to be identified with a rudimentary and inadequate type of knowledge about language, and that its validity was judged solely upon its power to increase competence⁴."

It is the method of studying language that should have been rejected, not the desirability of studying language itself. The method was counter-intuitive to the students, thereby divorcing what was being taught from the reality of their intuitive language knowledge. The methodology of explicit teaching of one variety of language as right and to be imitated at all times, particularly when based on misconceptions about the nature of language itself, is a more likely reason for the failure of old-style 'grammar' teaching, than the fact that the students were being taught to analyse their mother tongue.

If the methodology is based on working systematically through the language ability of the students, misconceptions about language are more likely to be held in check by the realities of language facts intuitively known by the students. Language analysis centred on the students' own knowledge will offer notions of appropriateness in place of notions of linguistic right and wrong, which will fit the language intuitions of the students.

In this way the horror of those who dread a return to old-style 'grammar' teaching can be avoided, while at the same time relief can be offered to those who want mother-tongue analysis taught.

1.10 From the central idea of the student possessing language and the teacher's role being to guide his analysis of it, we are led to prefer a particular method of teaching. This student-centred method ensures that the native speaker's intuitions are in harmony with the

4. Ibid. p.10.

teacher's presentation, which in turn offers some insurance against counter-intuitive concepts being advanced by the teacher, since the student is offered the initiative to protest by being raised to the status of partner already possessing language knowledge. He/she merely has a less developed awareness of that knowledge.

2.1 The teacher's role in language analysis elements of a Language Awareness course, as foreseen in 1, is that of a planner of a guided journey of exploration of the student's own knowledge of his/her mother tongue and his/her intuitions about language. It is inherently interesting for the student to be made aware of facts about language that he/she knows but does not realise he/she knows. Once alerted the student can work alone and prefers on balance to do so. Materials should therefore be geared to this fact. They should be explorations of language facts that he/she can think about for him/herself. He/she will in fact want to explore for him/herself once the interest is alerted and that interest is therefore likely to wane, if he/she is subjected to too much talk about language. The term "talk about language" here covers not only talk by the teacher: it also refers to general discussion in class and to the writing of essays discussing language. Essays of research on a particular language topic would qualify as handling language under this distinction between handling language in order to explore it and talking about it; essays discussing ideas about language would qualify as talking about it. General class discussion about language ideas would qualify as talking about language; the volunteering and discussion of particular examples of language would be handling language facts themselves and, it is proposed, would be inherently more interesting to the student. It is only when the student develops a penchant for language study as an academic discipline that the 'talking about' - the theoretical discussion - should be allowed into prominence.

This emphasis on the student being guided to explore for him/herself holds good for all ages and ability levels. The nature of the exploration will, of course, have to be adjusted to suit the level being taught, but not the principle itself of working through the students' own language knowledge.

2.2 One important contribution the teacher must make in any kind of Language Awareness course is to make sure that the progression of topics handled in the syllabus is sequenced in the most effective way. The handling of some topics can be more effective if they are preceded by others. The notions of variety of language and register are clearer in their presentation to the students, if they have already been introduced to differences between written and spoken language, for example.

Equally important, once the order of presentation of topics is

decided, is that there is a focussing on one topic at a time. It is probably easier to go off at tangents when handling language than in almost any other area. Such tangents blur the focus on the particular point and hence jeopardise the build-up of the explicit aspect of language awareness defined by the aims of the syllabus.

2.3 The premise of working through the students' language ability to bring them awareness of it can also be of help in the matter of terminology.

If the teacher aims to concentrate on exemplification first to illustrate the concept and on naming second to label it, the focus is once again placed on what the student intuitively knows in line with the basic premise advanced in this paper. The importance of the teacher at this point lies in his/her being able to 'tee up' the examples effectively to lead the student towards the concept.

The progression in presenting a topic should therefore be along the pattern of:

i) a brief introduction, informally expressed, of the area of language to be studied;

ii) a handling of material to illustrate the concept through exemplification;

iii) (if i. and ii. achieve their objective) a production by the students of their own examples, their own objections to and refinements of the concept. If the third stage is reached there should be no trouble about attaching a name to the concept.

For example, the concept of the morpheme can be presented in terms of there being units of meaning smaller than a word; accompanying examples should be plentiful, both invented and - as much as possible - actual, such as Sam Goldwyn's "In two words - impossible". Then the students explore problems for themselves revolving around the concept of minimal units. The students will then be volunteering comments on the problems and variations involved in trying to define the concept, which can now be labelled 'morpheme'.

2.4 The premise of working through the students' language ability to teach the language analysis aspect of language awareness, the allied premise of it being more effective for the student to handle carefully prepared language problems rather than talk about language - these premises entail dealing with language analysis at a pre-theoretical level. The students are looking at the language facts that linguistic theories seek to classify and describe - whether the theory is the inadequate description that inspired old-style 'grammar' teaching or a description of the order of systemic or transformational generative grammar.

2.5 In 2.3 we looked at the notion that the focussing on a linguistic concept should be with emphasis on the exploration of examples,

in preference to emphasising the name first. The question of how to introduce terminology and what terminology to use is complicated by the fact firstly that some linguistic terminology - noun, verb, sentence - is in the everyday language, secondly that there are a number of terms - prefix, suffix, relative pronoun - firmly established from traditional language analysis usage, and thirdly that more recent terminology can have varying interpretations or go out of favour.

This variety in terminological usage is an added reason for concentrating on exploration of examples to reach the concept. In addition the amount of terminology should be kept to the essential, even for older students, and that essential can be supplied for the most part from the familiar or the traditional. For example, one may need the more technical term of 'morpheme' (if one needs a term at all) to cover the overall notion of a minimal unit of meaning, but the traditional terms of prefix and suffix are available for particular types of morpheme. In such cases the familiar and the traditional should be preferred.

It may be argued that linguistic terms of familiar or traditional use may be too loose in definition, but this is no different a situation to that facing a Physics teacher when required to present students with a more rigid definition of the term 'work' than the one they attach to it in everyday usage. It is, in fact, the purpose of Language Awareness courses dealing with analyses requiring such terminology, that they should seek to define more precisely in the students' mind concepts of language to which that terminology applies, whether the terms are already to some degree familiar or not.

2.6 It may be argued that the Physics teacher presents the student with a formula definition of the narrow sense of 'work' required in Physics, namely that it equals force times distance moved, and that this firm equation provides something for the student to grasp while acquiring the concept. No similar security of formula is available to help the student grasp the concepts behind linguistic terminology. The inadequacy of any attempt to define terms such as 'noun', 'phoneme' is notorious. They are either semantically-based and the vocabulary does not fit the grammatical function, or they are defined by other terms in a meaningless circularity.

The solution to this dilemma is found yet again in the underlying premise that the students already possess intuitive knowledge of language. If that is accepted, then it must also be accepted that, unlike in Physics, they are secure in their possession of the experimental data. They do not have to acquire it. Therein lies their security in handling the aspect of language awareness that considers analyses of the mother tongue. This is a further reason for arguing the approach to linguistic concepts through emphasis on language facts rather than through emphasis on terminology.

If this latter point is accepted, then confusion through complexity of language - as opposed to confusion caused by complicatedness of presenting how it should be analysed - is not a danger, since the students' language intuition tells them that they have the security of the native speaker's knowledge.

This security of control of the data means that the terminology can vary, the main considerations being those of consistency and familiarity of the terms. It also means that a rigid theoretical statement is less vital as a framework to hold on to. All that is needed is a guideline of clear syllabus progression and clear presentation of each topic to help the students make and order their insights into their intuitive knowledge, which is a pedagogic matter of course planning and preparation.

A further implication of this security of control of the data is that the language-analysis aspect of language awareness could provide for older students a good context for teaching the nature and importance of theory construction.